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Language use in Norwegian-Ukrainian multilingual couples

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Abstract

As a result of globalization, interpersonal relations are now being constructed across borders, cultures, and languages. Concurrent with this trend runs the emergence of English as *the* lingua franca. In the present study, the patterns of language use are examined in Norwegian-Ukrainian multilingual couples residing in Norway. The overarching objective of the project was to explore how these couples create their private lingua franca and engage in building their shared linguistic culture. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five couples. Most of them had adopted a pragmatic attitude to language choice, employing English as the strongest and fairest shared language and having recourse to code-switching when necessary. The process of common linguistic culture building in the participating couples is characterized by linguistic relaxedness.

Keywords: *intercultural couples, multilingual, English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), code switching, linguistic relaxedness*

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1. Introduction

The process of globalization has not only brought about changes in political, economic, and cultural domains but also shaped individuals and the way interpersonal relations are constructed. The emergence of English as a lingua franca in most parts of Europe - i.e., a contact language used by speakers who do not share a native language – has been concomitant with and resultant of the aforementioned changes.High-speed travel, new communication technologies, and increased globalization have brought individuals with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds into contact, increasing the frequency of intercultural marriages (Romano 2008:viii). In this far more private domain, English has also proved indispensable (Gundacker 2010:6, Pietikäinen 2014:2). Romano (2008:31) identifies language and communication as a potential challenge in all marriages, but the degree to which this issue rises in intercultural marriages is much higher since it involves cultural identity and 'thereby [is] unconscious and more difficult to resolve'.

Language use in Norwegian-Ukrainian couples has not previously been studied; however, the intercultural experiences of these couples and their problem-solving strategies have been explored by Pashchuk (2012). In the present study, the emphasis is put on how partners employ and switch between different languages – English, Norwegian, Ukrainian, and Russian – in their daily communication. The overriding goal is to investigate and describe how the participants create what Gundacker (2010:12) calls 'the private lingua franca' through switching between their native languages and/or using a common foreign language.

The following research questions have been addressed in the study:

- What are the couples' perceptions of the role of English as their lingua franca?

- In what way do the couples draw upon resources from multiple languages in their daily communication?

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Language use in intercultural and multilingual couples

Intercultural and multilingual couples are conceptualized as 'consisting of partners from different countries, nationalities, ethnicities, and religions who may possess quite divergent beliefs, assumptions, and values as a result of their socialization in different sociocultural spaces' (Killian 2009:xviii).

Language often affects the balance of power in an intercultural marriage, especially when one of the spouses uses the native language, whereas the other speaks a foreign language (Romano 2008:129). Eventually, the majority of intercultural couples develop their own private language based on lessons learned from the past communication missteps and the couple's newly-emerged common culture (Romano 2008:133). The idea of third culture building has been introduced by Casmir as 'a process by which different cultural groups come together to form a third culture between them' (Hopson et al. 2012:792). This newly-established culture, achieved through mutual understanding, dialog and negotiations, becomes the common cognitive space with elements from both participating cultures (Casmir 1999, Hopson et al. 2012).

Language use in multilingual couples and families has been thoroughly researched within linguistics (e.g., De Klerk 2001, Goncalves 2013, Gundacker 2010, Piller 2002,Yamamoto 2001). However, hitherto only one study on Norwegian-Ukrainian marriages has been conducted (Pashchuk 2012). Pashchuk (2012:24) claims that in the dating phase, the lack of Norwegian or English proficiency encouraged couples to spend more time together in an attempt to understand and get to know each other. The respondents mainly spoke Norwegian in their spousal interactions when the Ukrainian spouse's language proficiency allowed it. Language fluency in Norwegian was the couples' paramount concern inasmuch as inadequate knowledge of Norwegian evokes a sense of dependency and a dearth of autonomy in the Ukrainian spouse and magnifies conflict due to misunderstandings. However, Pashchuk's findings apply exclusively to Norwegian-Ukrainian couples who live in Norway.

2.2. English as a lingua franca (ELF)

In my project, the following understanding of ELF has been adopted: 'any use of English among speakers of different first languages for whom English is the communicative medium of choice, and often the only option' (Seidlhofer 2011:7). Because of its widespread use as a means of communication in contexts where speakers do not share the same native language, English is considered to be *the* lingua franca nowadays (Berns et al. 2009:369, Seidlhofer 2011:2).

The early focus of ELF research lay on the formal characteristics in order to establish the fundamental linguistic properties of ELF (Cogo & Dewey 2012:2). However, eventually the paradigmatic shift has occurred from the sociolinguistic description of language forms to the study of 'the underlying processes that give rise to the emerging forms' (ibid.). The speakers of ELF 'routinely exploit the language to fit the immediate communicative environment, adapting and blending English innovatively and resourcefully in order to achieve a jointly constructed means of conveying and interpreting meaning' (Cogo & Dewey 2012:4).

In ELF research, a long tradition exists of concentrating on the native speakers' and the academics' attitudes towards and perceptions of ELF. Seidlhofer (2011:28) summarizes the possessive 'Anglo-Saxon attitudes' towards the English languages as expressed by the laypeople; Jenkins (2007:34) postulates that '[t]he desire to preserve the English 'asset' for its historical 'owners' is inevitably bound up with the […] standard language ideology' and draws links between the aforementioned ideology and negative attitudes towards ELF among the academic community and the lay population. However, a gradual shift of emphasis has occurred in ELF research towards the exploration of the non-native speakers' attitudes to

ELF and non-native varieties (for examples of such research see Jenkins 2007, Jenkins 2009). Based on the outline of current issues and studies in ELF research (Mauranen & Ranta 2009), it appears that more research is needed into the perceptions of ELF expressed by its users in non-academic, non-business, and non-pedagogical settings.

Gundacker's (2010) study of five ELF couples provides insight into the couple's perceptions of their language choice, motivations for choosing ELF, its advantages and disadvantages. Despite the fact that for the majority of the participants the communicative goal and intelligibility outweighed correctness, 'proper' English was still measured against native varieties. Since all ELF speakers are bi- or multilingual, 'ELF interactions are likely to include borrowing, code-switching, and other types of crosslinguistic interaction' (Mackenzie 2014:4).

2.3. Code switching

In the linguistics literature, one can find a plethora of definitions and typologies of code switching. According to MacSwan (2004:283), it is 'the alternate use of two (or more) languages within the same utterance'. Further, two types of code switching are identified: intrasentential (i.e., an alternation within the same sentence) and intersentential (i.e., the switching between sentences). Whereas MacSwan (2004) does not employ the term *code mixing*, Ritchie and Bhatia (2004:336-337) differentiate between code switching,characterized by the use of linguistic units from several languages across sentence boundaries within a speech event (i.e., MacSwan's intersentential code switching), and code mixing, which refers to the use of linguistic units from two or more languages within the same sentence (i.e., intrasentential code switching in MacSwan's typology). Wei (2005:275) chooses the wider approach and conceptualizes bilingual code switching as 'the alternation of languages in the same interactional episode'. In an attempt to amalgamate the varying views, I have decided to utilize the term *code switching* in its broadest sense as an umbrella term for different varieties of language alternation within a single speech event.

Four crucial influences can determine language choice and code switching in bilingual interactions: a) the social roles and relationships of the participants; b) situational factors; c) message-intrinsic considerations; and d) language attitudes. Multilingual participants reach an agreement on language choice based on a mutual understanding of roles, relationships, and communicative rights and obligations. Situational factors determine the domain(s) in which each language is appropriate and the spheres of use, the most perceptible distinction being participants' public arena as opposed to their private world. Some of the message-intrinsic factors are reported speech, reiteration, hedging, interjections, idioms, and deep-rooted cultural wisdom. Lastly, individual and societal attitudes towards languages involved, language dominance, and linguistic proficiency of interlocutors can regulate language use and potential code switching (Ritchie & Bhatia 2004:338-352).

Pietikäinen (2014) approaches the question of ELF couples' communication from the angle of code switching. ELF couples seem to employ code switching creatively for a variety of purposes: demonstrating use of language (giving examples of the use of other languages); automatic code switching without flagging and specific purpose; replacing/clarifying unfamiliarities, i.e., words or utterances that the speaker does not know or cannot recall in English; replacing non-translatables, i.e., culture-bound terms that do not translate directly into English; specifying addressees, e.g., using L1 when addressing children; and emphasizing the message, when extra stress is mediated by code switching (Pietikäinen 2014:6-7). Pietikäinen (2014:18) maintains that automatic code switching is not always a conscious choice for ELF speakers: it seems habitual, occurs passively, is tacitly allowed by the hearer because 'understanding is not endangered when shared multilingual resources are used'.

3. Data collection

3.1. Participants

Participants should be 'experienced and knowledgeable in the area you are interviewing about' (Rubin & Rubin 2005: 64). For the current project, it was crucial to recruit couples that satisfied the following criteria:

- One of the partners is Norwegian, while the other one is Ukrainian.
- The Norwegian partner considers Norwegian to be his mother tongue, while the Ukrainian partner considers Ukrainian or Russian her mother tongue.
- The couple has lived together for more than two years.
- The couple currently resides in Norway.

By using the adjective *Ukrainian* I refer to ethnicity and origin rather than citizenship: several participants currently hold Norwegian citizenship, but still describe themselves as Ukrainians. Another point to be made is the fact that the Ukrainian society is functionally bilingual in that most Ukrainians are fluent in both Ukrainian and Russian. Despite the speakers' individual linguistic preferences and choices, both languages are represented in the public and private discourse. However, it is worth noting that certain regional preferences and differences exist in the distribution of Ukrainian and Russian as Ukrainians' native language, which both enriches and challenges the linguistic landscape of the country.

Using the possessive adjective *his* for the Norwegian spouse and *her* for the Ukrainian one has been dictated by pragmatic concerns: in all the couples that participated in the current project, the Norwegian spouse was male, whereas the Ukrainian spouse was female. Curiously, I have never met, or heard of a couple where the female partner would be Norwegian and the male partner would be Ukrainian. This is in line with Romano's findings (2008): most frequently the wife follows her husband to his homeland and has to adapt to a new set of living patterns and learn the language of the country.

Purposive theoretical sampling strategy has been used (Dörnyei 2007:126). The couples were chosen based on their willingness to discuss features of their language use. Two couples and a wife were recruited in one of the groups for Ukrainians abroad on *Facebook*; the other two couples were recruited by being vouched for by the participants from *Facebook*. All the participants currently reside in the western part of Norway. Nine of the ten participants in my study are highly educated professionals with at least four years of the formal tertiary education. Provided in the table below is a summary of the information about the participants:

Couple	**Participant(s) interviewed (H – husband, W – wife)**	**Age range**	**Occupation (sphere)**	**Languages spoken (in order of acquisition)**
1	H1 & W1 W1: 7 years in Norway	H1: 41-45 W1: 36-40	H1: oil industry W1: public services	H1: Norwegian, English, German W1: Russian, Ukrainian, English, German, Norwegian
2	W2 W2: almost 4 years in Norway	H2:: 31-35 W2: 26-30	H2: oil industry W2: education (currently on maternity leave)	H2: Norwegian, English W2: Russian, Ukrainian, English, Norwegian
3	H3 & W3 W3: 11 years in Norway	H3:: 51-55 W3: 36-40	H3: construction W3: human resources	H3: Norwegian, English W3: Ukrainian, Russian, English, German, Norwegian
4	H4 & W4 W4: 5 years in Norway	H4:: 41-45 W4: 31-35	H4: oil industry W4: finance	H4: Norwegian, English W4: Russian, Ukrainian, English, Norwegian

5	H5 & W5 W5: 15 years in Norway	H5:: 31-35 W5: 36-40	H5: oil industry W5: education	H5: Norwegian, English, Russian/Ukrainian (basic skills) W5: Russian, Ukrainian, French, English, Norwegian

Table 1: *Information about the participants*

3.2. Interview

The topical semi-structured interview has been used, whose goal is to arrive at a coherent explanation of a phenomenon by studying and interpreting the participants' accounts (Dörnyei 2007:134-136). My interview guide has been inspired by De Klerk (2001), Gundacker (2010), and Pietikäinen (2014). It consisted of four blocks:

- Couple's story and background (including linguistic history)
- Language use and code-switching
- English as a lingua franca
- Attitudes (thoughts on the linguistic situation, strengths and weaknesses as a multilingual couple, advantages and disadvantages of ELF)

The data for this project were collected in April-May 2015. The total of four hours and forty-seven minutes of data has been collected with the longest interview lasting one hour and ten minutes and the shortest one amounting to thirty-nine minutes. My participants chose to be interviewed in their own homes. All the interviews were conducted in English, and one couple resolved that only the wife should be interviewed. The interviews were recorded and partial transcriptions of the sections have been prepared for analysis. Since all the interviews had been conducted in English, there was no need to provide translation. However, the translation of individual words is provided where the couples used or gave examples of code switching.

4. Findings and discussion

4.1. Perceptions of the role of English as the couples' lingua franca

Four couples reported regular use of ELF in their daily communication and claimed ELF to be their couple language, while one couple, couple 4, gradually switched to Norwegian. This stands in stark contrast to Pashchuk's findings, where she concludes that Norwegian-Ukrainian couples residing in Norway typically speak Norwegian in their spousal interactions (Pashchuk 2012:23). Since all of the participants in my study have an adequate command of English, the choice of ELF as a means of communication, at least during the initial stage of relationship, was logical and unquestionable. Even the couple who now uses Norwegian spoke English in the beginning without a shadow of a doubt:

> *When I met her, English was the only option for us. I knew like two words in Russian and she spoke no Norwegian, naturally. And what do you do then? You look for the next best alternative, which in both our cases was English. But I guess it is the same for everyone now since English is like the language of the world. (H4).*

My findings confirm Gundacker's (2010:13-14) assumption that language choice often happens automatically inasmuch as multilingual couples either choose the language they used when they first met or the language that both are most familiar with. Consequently, Rosenblatt's (2009:13) statement about the couple language usually being the language of the older male partner with more substantial economic

resources is not supported by my findings. For my participants, the use of ELF is a matter of convenience and healthy pragmatism rather than a power struggle. H5 addresses his wife and rationalizes the couple's language choice: 'You have your widest repertoire in Russian and I have it in Norwegian but in English we have our widest common repertoire'.

The issue of fairness and linguistic equality appears prominent to my participants:

> *We speak English to each other because it is fair. Imagine just for a second that I had to abandon, to leave my home country, my culture, my language and even my food and move here to Norway. Because I knew from the start that he would never manage life in Ukraine. So, I moved here, I learned the language of the country. Not perfect but I did! I made all those little and big sacrifices and then I think he should do the same. Or not the same but at least a little bit. Like for example talking in English. And for him it's not even a sacrifice because his English is good, way better than my. But still, anyway, I feel it is more fair, more normal. (W3)*

ELF is commonly perceived as a neutral alternative that the couples resort to, a compromise whereby the Norwegian partner compensates for the inconveniences the Ukrainian partner had to face due to relocation and readjustment. Gundacker (2010:71-72) also emphasizes that one of the motivations for and advantages of ELF is that for couples it is a neutral and fair alternative. When choosing a lingua franca, many groups favor what Van Herk (2012:140) calls a 'neutral' language, i.e., a language that is not the native language of the interacting groups. Inasmuch as a neutral language does not favor any of the groups involved, it has its social advantages.

Several participants discussed ELF in terms of identity and their self-concept:

> *Well, OK, my English is not perfect but you know what? It still feels like my language, like a mother language I mean. I don't have all the detailed words and sometimes I make some funny sayings and my husband just laughs kindly at my Ukrainian English and my accent. But now it is part of me and sometimes I even struggle when I know the word in English and must translate it very quickly to Ukrainian. (W3)*

> *W5: Being a linguist, I feel that I don't have sufficient discourse skills and rhetorical devices to be able to perform a good job in Norwegian. Just it is too basic, too quotidian, too simple. Again, most people experience me as being relatively fluent but as a person who teaches languages I know that it is not fully good. When I write something, when it's important, I spend hours and analyze it before presenting it.*

> *I: Being a native speaker, what would you say about your wife's Norwegian skills?*

> *H5: Hm... She is perfectly able to function in Norwegian and to switch fully to Norwegian. But as a linguist you feel that you lack all those little words, spices, you know, like little things. But you could fully switch to Norwegian and use it exclusively.*

> *W5: But part of my personality would disappear, I am afraid.*

> *I: What part?*

> *W5: A big part (laughs). Like cultural, humoristic… Well, like things that make me me.*

> *I: Do you feel like that you have this personality when speaking English?*

W5: Absolutely. I am as close to my true self as possible when speaking English. You know, considering that it is my second language. Or fourth, really.

After all the years of using ELF on a daily basis, the participants perceive it as part of their identity and a feature that defines who they are. The level of language skills and fluency prove more or less irrelevant for the participants' ties to ELF, since they believe that their identities can be successfully performed with the current level of skills. Pietikäinen (2014:3, 19) also supports the notion of identity marking in ELF. A substantial number of Piller's (2002) participants found it difficult to change from the language of their first encounter and the initial phase of their relationship. This difficulty is explicable in terms of 'the close relationship between language and the performance of identity' (Piller 2002:137). Performance of identity is the process of 'a local construction that occurs in particular communities of practice' (Piller 2002:11). For most people, the major arena for doing identity, a major community of practice is a couple relationship. Most of this ongoing construction of identity is done linguistically because 'language is the most important symbolic resource human beings have at their disposal' (Piller 2002:12).

Additionally, ELF is regarded as a couple's private 'bubble' (Here I borrow the term introduced by the participant W5, who described ELF in the following way: 'English is our language, our bubble'):

We normally speak English to each other but now that we have a baby three languages would be too much for her. So, I speak only Russian to her, my husband speaks Norwegian and when we are all together as a family with our baby, I also speak Norwegian. So, I am kind of throwing English in the bucket right now. English is just in the evening when she goes to bed. But it is still our language, my and my husband's when there are just the two of us. (W2)

My participants brought up the idea of private language associating ELF with privacy, comfort, and relaxation. Couple 1 admitted on multiple occasions that they would like to switch to Norwegian but in addition to a relative privacy ELF offers, they also appreciate its comfort, predictability, and efficiency:

H1: In English, we are in a comfort zone. We do not lack understanding, it is a habit, and she is comfortable. But we want to stop using English.

W1: Me too, I would like. But it is much more comfortable for me to use English, but on the other hand I live in Norway. But he will start using Norwegian with me, and then he will like "I am so hungry, let's go eat some kebab". And I am like "Why are you speaking English to me?" But I want to speak Norwegian. English I will understand quicklier [sic]. So he doesn't want to repeat two times in Norwegian.

Both partners in couple 5 are aware of the privacy and intimacy ELF offers and reflect upon how their use of ELF can impinge on their relationships with the Norwegian family. Thus, they switch to Norwegian 'for their convenience so that they do not feel excluded or awkward around us' (W5). Thereby the two participants make a clear distinction between ELF, their 'bubble' language, and Norwegian, a means of communication with other people.

Interestingly, couple 4, who chose to switch to Norwegian shortly after the wife had started learning it, identified many of the same perceptions of Norwegian as the other couples noted regarding ELF: Norwegian is associated with comfort, privacy, relaxation, and free expression of identity. Despite both partners' fluency in English, Norwegian has become the main means of communication in this couple – a canvas on which some words and expressions from the couple's other languages appear sporadically. Thus, this couple confirms Pietikäinen's (2014:2) claim that linguistic establishment in a multilingual couple may change over time. However, while Pietikäinen (2014:2) exemplifies her statement with such radical occurrences as a baby's birth or moving to a different country, in my study the couple's linguistic establishment changed due to the mere fact that the wife acquired enough Norwegian to be able to communicate effectively.

4.2. Code switching and use of multiple languages

Quite a few participants acknowledged the fact that speaking multiple languages can offer a variety of linguistic tools for self-expression and that code switching is both useful and amusing:

> *I think it's fun to switch between languages because you feel a bit international. I think it's cool as well. Your brain is working all the time, you have to use your memory, you have to suck the words from TV, from your work, your communication. You speak English and then you switch to Norwegian, just a word or two to make a joke more pretty. For example yesterday I made a joke and used some Norwegian words and my husband was laughing because it sounded funny. (W2)*

Clearly, this participant does not employ code switching to compensate for linguistic deficiencies; on the contrary, she draws upon resources from English and Norwegian in order to make her joke funnier and more culturally relevant for her Norwegian husband. In Klimpfinger's (2009:360) terms, the participant is signaling culture, particularly the Norwegian one, by means of code switching. A rather typical use of code switching discovered during data analysis is replacing non-translatable words and expressions of cultural wisdom. However, this application of code switching is never entirely effortless forasmuch as the partner who code switches must make sure that his or her interlocutor possesses the same cultural and linguistic references: 'When I say anything in Russian, just a word or a funny expression, I have to make sure that he knows why it's witty. So, I'll be explaining the thing to him in Norwegian until he gets it (*laughs*)' (W4).

None of my respondents deemed code switching inappropriate or improper and no apologetic attitudes towards code switching were expressed. My participants and Gundacker's (2010) participants do not perceive code switching as problematic, contrary to what Piller (2002:145-148) experienced in her study. One would assume that drawing upon resources from multiple languages would be valued, admired, and encouraged in today's society. Sadly, the dominant view among monolinguals and some linguists is that code switching is primarily a strategy for masking linguistic deficiency (Ritchie & Bhatia 2004:337-338). Conversely, Van Herk (2012:137-139) argues that code switching is often concomitant with fluency in both languages. Code switching is widely employed to meet the speakers' creative needs, signal a multicultural identity, and identify with certain values. Cogo (2009:268) also supports this view with the empirical evidence, stating that 'code-switching is used as an additional resource to achieve particular conversational goals in interactions with other intercultural speakers'.

The participants noticed and commented on another application of code switching – searching for what MacKenzie (2014:24) calls *le mot juste*[1]: '[c]onscious borrowing, calquing and code-switching by fluent bilinguals are generally the result of semantic decisions: one language seems to express something better than the other, possessing the right turn of phrase or *le mot juste*'. Exhibiting linguistic awareness, my participants discerned this property of code switching and articulated it: 'If I am using some kind words, some self-made words, I have to say it in Russian. In a cute way, you know. Russian is just more productive, allows changing words and mixing several words. He understands me by the way' (W1). These two participants also provide telling examples:

> *Some words are just so much more natural in Norwegian. So, I just have to say them in Norwegian. Like the difference between sykemelding and egenmelding*[2]*. That's why I use the Norwegian words even if I tell my husband about my work in English. (W3)*

> *Sometimes I feel like I have to say an expression or two in Russian. It's just because the Norwegian language doesn't have the same comparisons and metaphors. So, I'll say things in Russian and then translate them into Norwegian for [husband's name]. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. But anyway, the best word, the most precise word cannot always be found in Norwegian. (W4)*

As the participants encounter daily communication challenges and resolve them in the continuous process of third culture building, they establish their own linguistic practices and rules and negotiate the domains

where different languages are used and/or mixed. Consequently, various communicative tasks require different languages and forms of expression:

> *When I want to express my love, mostly it would be English and Norwegian. Sometimes it is Russian and he understands in Russian about love. He knows some phrases and understands what I mean. It is fun when we are in that mood to mix and joke about it. But love expression is mostly English and Norwegian. To say it in my native language still sound a bit strange to me because we are not using it that much. […] Swearing comes only in Norwegian for me because I am not swearing in my own language. It is just too much. And then when he swears in Norwegian, it is easy for me to understand. When I would swear in Ukrainian or Russian, he wouldn't understand. So it is unfair. (W2)*

> *Telling her that I love her only happens in English. I know how to say it in Russian and Ukrainian but it doesn't feel genuine to me. Not in Norwegian either by the way. (H3)*

> *As I said, our main language is Norwegian. But it doesn't mean like 100 percent Norwegian all the time. We use some Russian strong words, like cursing, when we are really angry. I learned them from [wife's name] and they sound funny and don't carry any weight when I say them. So I have taken to using them myself. (H4)*

Cogo (2009:263) states that multilingual speakers 'jointly construct social meaning in interactions, assigning different functions to different codes'. Ultimately, these linguistic practices become habitual and deeply ingrained in couple communication, which sparks what Pietikäinen (2014:18, 21) labeled as automatic code switching, i.e., ELF couples' communication habit that derives from a relaxed attitude towards language mixing for the higher purpose of mutual understanding and intelligibility. This so-called relaxed attitude to language use in the name of meaning-making constitutes the notion of *linguistic relaxedness* (Pietikäinen 2014:20): code switching within the partners' shared range is allowed; linguistic resources are drawn from other languages because shared linguistic competencies are explicit to all participants, and thus understanding is not jeopardized. Grammatical correctness and lexical choices are subordinate to mutual understanding and cooperative meaning-making. One of the participants provides a rather telling comment on linguistic relaxedness: 'We mix very often. If we are relaxed, we don't think much about being proper. Then anything goes. Sometimes when I am tired, just like exhausted at home, I will say an English sentence with totally Russian structure.' (W5).

5. Conclusion

In the present study, language use in Norwegian-Ukrainian multilingual couples residing in Norway has been studied from two angles: the couples' perceptions of ELF and code switching in couple communication. The purpose of the project was to explore how the couples create their private lingua franca and engage in third culture building from the linguistic point of view. Moreover, my ambition has been to contribute to the emerging body of knowledge on the uses of ELF in non-academic and non-business contexts.

The five couples who participated in the project adopted a pragmatic attitude to language choice and language use. All of them started their relationships using their best common language – English – and afterwards only one couple switched to Norwegian, in which they find the same characteristics that the other four find in ELF: privacy, intimacy, comfort, relaxation, and unobstructed expression of identity. As far as ELF couples in my sample are concerned, they appreciate the fairness and equality that ELF as a means of communication brings into the relationship. Additionally, it creates a couple's shared private space that separates them from the other people at their convenience: ELF resembles a couple's private island in the ocean of Norwegian.

Contrary to certain negative attitudes to code switching, my participants regard it as a significant communicative resource that offers flexibility of self-expression, signaling of culture, and increased

linguistic awareness. Two predominant uses of code switching emerged in my data: replacing non-[10] translatables and resorting to the most appropriate word in any of the couple's languages. Finally, the process of common language building and use in Norwegian-Ukrainian couples is characterized by what Pietikäinen (2014:20) calls linguistic relaxedness, which is, according to the research I have read, a common trait of all intercultural multilingual couples.

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[1] The right word (from French).

[2] Different types of sick leave in Norway.

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